

Myaer House  
2747 Old Hardin Road  
Lockwood Flats  
Billings  
Yellowstone County  
Montana

HABS No. MT-69-A

HABS  
MONT,  
56-BILL,  
1-A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historical American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

MYAER HOUSE

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Location: 2747 Old Hardin Road, Lockwood (area), Billings, Yellowstone County, Montana 59101. SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$  Section 19, Township 1 North, Range 27 East; UTM: 12/700870/5076330

Present Owner: The site is owned by Mr. & Mrs. Gene Myaer (1809 Old Sorrel Trail, Billings) and Mr. & Mrs. Vernon Hoff. It is rented by Dudley and Dawn Lutton.

Present Use: The site is a rural/suburban residence presently having no agricultural use. At the end of June, 1986, the present owners began to dismantle the barn, piece by piece. The barn no longer stands. The residence remains, but the proximity of the Johnson Lane Interchange on Interstate Highway 90 encourages commercial development of the property.

Statement of Significance: The site is locally significant for its architectural importance as a representative example of Craftsman style house and barn combination construction, popularized by building guides and farm journals in Montana during the homesteading period, 1890-1930. It was determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places on January 2, 1986.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection:

The date(s) of construction is unknown, but is estimated to be between 1909 and 1919. The architectural style, site history, and agricultural history of the western United States indicate that the two structures were built at about that time.

First, the use of pattern book designs for small house construction was popular in the U.S. between about 1880 and 1930. Second, a review of the homestead proof for the land on which the site stands shows that all buildings constructed up to 1900 were log. Therefore, the Craftsman-style residences and barn post-date 1900. Finally, the man who homesteaded the land, Brian Hart, apparently sold the property in about 1909. This date coincides with the establishment of the Lockwood Irrigation District which provided the first opportunity for the landowner to irrigate crops and thereby boost production. By 1919, the agricultural economy in Montana and throughout the West and Midwest had taken a decided turn for the worst, due to drought and unrealistic investments in land, equipment, and livestock during World War I. This information suggests that the residence and barn at the site were built sometime between 1909 when land prices and agricultural productivity boomed at Lockwood Flats and 1919 when the state in general began to experience a severe recession.

Original and Subsequent Owners:

The site is located on land ceded from the Crow Indian Reservation in 1892. Sometime between that date and 1895, the property was part of Ma-wah-soos' Indian allotment. On September 26, 1895, Brian Hart settled on the land; he patented 160 acres on October 21, 1901. He remained on the property until about 1909. Incomplete county records do not allow thorough documentation of the chain of title, but owners since 1930 are identified. They were: Harry L. Johnson (1930-1945), Otis Bethka (1945-1966), and Vernon Hoff and Gene Myaer (1966-present).

Historical Context:

The site lies within an area known locally as Lockwood Flats, named after the small town of Lockwood that stood there immediately after the turn of the century. The flats consist of approximately 5,000 acres of which 3,000 were irrigated farmland.

The agricultural potential of Lockwood Flats was recognized and exploited not long after the area was ceded from the Indian reservation. In 1895, the Coulson Ditch Company formed in the first collective effort to irrigate the lower elevations of the Flats. The area's proximity to the small but growing community of Billings and the Northern Pacific Railroad contributed to its value. In 1909, the Lockwood Irrigation District was formed under the then recently passed state legislation that enabled formation of irrigation districts. Being formed at such an early date, the Lockwood Irrigation District was one of the first such districts in the state.

Elsewhere in the Billings area at about the same time, other irrigation projects were developing. The Huntley project south of the Yellowstone River and east of Lockwood Flats was initiated under the Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902. About 35,000 acres were eventually brought under irrigation after construction was completed in 1909. The project was open for settlement in 1907. North of the Yellowstone, the Billings Land and Irrigation Company was formed in 1903 with the aim of irrigating tens of thousands of acres on the Billings Bench. Water was first run through the main canal in 1905. The first house was built on the Bench in 1904 and the big push for settlement was from 1907 to 1912.

Organized irrigation of these three areas occurred at approximately the same time. The methods of settlement were different for the three, however. On the Huntley project each person could only claim 40 acres (or 80 acres for a husband-wife team). Many of the families took only 40 acres because that was all they could afford. On the Billings Bench project, up to 160 acres could be purchased from the Billings Land and Irrigation Company, but with the price at \$35 and later \$50 per acre one suspects that smaller parcels were preferred. On Lockwood Flats, settlement was opened in 1892 and up to 160 acres could be patented under the 1862 Homestead Act at no cost to the homesteader except his labor and required improvements. One assumes that the

largest allowable acreage was preferred in this area and that most properties on the Flats were larger than on either the Huntley Project or Billings Bench.

Agricultural and social development of these irrigated areas east of Billings proper was probably parallel in many aspects. Sugar beets were the principal crop raised in the Lockwood Irrigation District and truck farming was also important. Although farmers with irrigated lands fared better than dryland farmers during the agricultural depression of the 1920s and 1930s, they too suffered from the drought conditions and slumping prices for agricultural products.

The character of land use immediately east of Billings began to change in the 1920s with the construction of several oil refineries there. These were built in response to the need for refinement of crude oil that was being extracted in regional oil fields. However, agriculture remained the primary land use at Lockwood Flats until after World War II. Within the last 40 years, the oil refineries have expanded and commercial and suburban residential development has characterized the changing land use on the Flats. Today the agricultural acreage is minimal.

The site represents the historic agricultural land use of Lockwood Flats, especially during a period of relative affluence prior to the 1920s and 1930s agricultural depression. Farmers having the opportunity to irrigate their crops (such as the site owners in the 1910s) were able to produce better crops than dryland farmers in other parts of Montana, and so were better able to afford popular Craftsman style homes and barns built with store-bought materials. With the recent radical change in land use in Lockwood Flats over the past 40 years, the residence and barn together stand as one of less than 15 sites with both house and barn dating to the early period of agricultural prominence.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### Architect or Engineer:

The residence and barn are of the Craftsman style that gained popularity through farm journals, catalogues, and mail order publications during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The exact pattern used was not determined, however, but the house is similar to Design No. 7015 in Radford's Combined House and Barn Plan Book.

### Exterior and Interior Features of Note:

The residence is a two story structure, measuring about 22 x 48 feet. It has clapboard siding, an asphalt shingled roof, and partial basement. It stands on a concrete foundation and is in good condition. The building has an intersecting gable roof with gable roofed, enclosed porch. Most of the windows are double hung 4-over-1. A shed-roofed porch has been added at the

back door on the east side. Most of the interior features that might reflect the structure's historic design have been altered by remodeling within the past 10 years. The only remaining such features of note are the built-in bookcase (minus glass doors) and the turned staircase balustrade on the first floor.

The barn was a large, gambrel-roofed, wood-sided structure set on a concrete foundation. It consisted of 1) the main portion which served as a hay barn and possibly horse and machinery shed, and 2) a milking room with shed roof. It measured about 33 x 36 feet. The roof was covered with tin roofing. The windows were either 4-over-4 double hung or 4 pane fixed.

Site: General Setting and Orientation

The site is located in an area of Lockwood Flats that still retains some of its rural flavor although commercial and residential development is rapidly encroaching. There are open fields east, south, and west of the residence and barn except at the southeast corner of Johnson Lane and Old Hardin Road where a convenience store was recently built (approximately 400 feet from the residence). Interstate 90 was constructed immediately north of the Myaer place in the 1960s. It lies less than 50 feet from the northwest corner of the site.

Site: Outbuildings

The dates of construction for the various buildings at the site could not be determined. The residence and barn were probably built between 1909 and 1919. Several outbuildings associated with the agricultural operation once stood on-site. None of those structures remain, nor do the original residence and other improvements Brian Hart made to prove up on his homestead. Today two recent structures stand in the yard. Both are modern, steel-sided outbuildings that have no historic significance.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interviews

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Interview, 23 July 1985.

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Interview, 24 July 1985.

B. Bibliography

Dove, Samuel E. "A History of the Billings Bench Water Association and Its Predecessors 1903-1935." Manuscript on file as Pamphlet 1775, Montana Historical Society Library, Helena, 1984.

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Harding, S. T. "Irrigation Development in Montana." Montana Agricultural College Experiment Station Bulletin 103 (1915).

Harvey, Thomas. "Mail-Order Architecture in the Twenties." Landscape 25(3):1 (1981).

Montana Postal Cache. "List of Montana Post Offices." Manuscript on file, Montana Historical Society Library, Helena, 1974-1976.

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Steere, Peter L. "Cultural Resource Evaluation Project, Historic Sites, Johnson Lane Interchange I 90-8(77)455." Butte: Mineral Research Center, 1981. Copy on file, Montana Department of Highways, Helena.

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Wright, Kathryn. Billings: The Magic City and How It Grew. By the author, Billings, 1978.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The purpose of the Johnson Lane Interchange highway project was to convert the existing separation structure at Johnson Lane to an interchange. Construction included addition of four ramps and realigning the existing north frontage road. The project has removed much of the traffic from the local road system and put it on Interstate 90 which can better handle the traffic volume. It was funded by the Federal Highway Administration and Montana Department of Highways, and was completed in 1987.

In anticipation of project construction, the property owner completely dismantled the barn. Because the new interchange will radically increase land values in the immediate vicinity of the project, it is expected that the residence will be destroyed or moved within a few years.

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